

Rick's Tricks

THE FOG OF WAR

By Rick Roeder

Rickro51@hotmail.com



Deception can be an important element in bridge. Psychic bids have gone out of favor over the past half century for various reasons. Both the ACBL and clubs have discouraged the use of psychics. Inexperienced players can struggle in dealing with psychics. In addition, repeated psychics by a partnership can give them an advantage on fielding a psych compared to their unsuspecting opponents.

True confessions: One of my favorite bridge books is Fred Karpin's 1960 classic: "Psychological Strategy In Contract Bridge." Please do not mention this to ACBL staff in Horn Lake because I truly do not want my membership revoked. His memorable work chronicled many psychics at the highest level of American bridge. Memoirs of a bygone era when you not did feel compelled to wear a Scarlet Letter after you committed a psych. I am delighted that the ACBL does not believe in book burning as the Karpin tome might have been the first casualty.

However, the use of a tactical bid – a polite term for a psych (or as the Aussies delightfully say, a "falsie") – has its place.

I was playing in the National Swiss Team in Austin. Our opponents were the best young pair in the bridge world: The Rimstedt brothers. The Swedish lads won the 2018 World Open Pairs in Orlando.

At all white, I picked up:

♠K ♥AKJ1075 ♦KJ652 ♣4

The auction proceeds:

ME	LHO	PARD	RHO
1♥	1♠	2♥	2♠
?			

What would you bid? Decide before reading on.

If Jim Phelps of Mission Impossible had given me my task, such mission would be to buy the hand in 4♥. Phelps knew the tyrannical power of the boss suit. If I bashed a 4♥ bid, he was concerned that the opponents would counter with 4♠. I could "walk the dog" with 3♥ or make a 3♦ game try. Both are reasonable options.

I wanted to let my esteemed opponents think that they had more defense than they did. I elected to make a tactical bid of 3♣. My LHO made a game try of 3♦. Hmmmm....My hand's power may have diminished but I did not want to let down Mr. Phelps. Pard jumped to 4♥, at which time LHO produced the red card.

A trump was led as I perused Pard's hand:

♠Q754 ♥Q432 ♦93 ♣K62

I won in my hand and led a Club, knowing that the King was almost certain to score at trick 2. Success! My doubled contract was now assured. I led a Diamond to my Jack as Lefty won the Queen. He flipped his last trump on the table as RHO discarded a Club. I won and led a Diamond toward the 9♦. Lefty won the 10♦ and returned the ♠J. I went into shock when my stiff King became a winner. Amazingly, against one of the best pairs in the world, I had watched them whiff on both of their black Aces. +690, baby!! Lefty had his double as RHO held:

♠10xx ♥x ♦xxx ♣Q10xxxx

I was not the only tactical bidder on this hand. LHO was certain that his brother held the ♠K for his 2♠ call. OOPS!

As fate would have it, this formidable pair sat down against us on the following day, as both teams advanced from Day 1 of the 3-Day event. I picked up the following:

♠x ♥QJ9xxxx ♦Kxx ♣Qx

At all white, Pard opens 1♠ and Righty overcalled 2♣. Your call?

Because I had 2 negative features, the stiff Spade and the dubious value of the ♣Q, I decided to take the low road and made a negative double. LHO bid 3♣. In pass out seat, I chirped 3♥. After some thought, LHO bid 3NT.

I have an 8 count opposite an opening bid. 3NT seemed to be an unlikely contract at the other table, particularly since the contract was bid in a halting manner. My Club holding made me want to throw up. I did not like my chances. What to do? I viewed passing as a bid an ostrich would make. While a 4♥ bid might work out, I doubled with a confident air, hoping that my "bluff" double would get the brothers to run to 4♣. After some consideration, LHO did run, holding:

♠KQxxx ♥Kx ♦xx ♣Jxxx

3NT was cold as 6 Clubs and 2 top Hearts get the opponents to 8 tricks. Either a Spade trick or a slow Diamond gets them to 9. While the Rimstedts may think I am a crazy, loose cannon, the truth is that these two hands were my only "operations" in 10 days of bridge. Unorthodox actions do not always work. During the event, I elected to underlead an Ace at trick 1 against the Helness-Helgemo juggernaut. OOPS! Leading any other suit would have set the contract.

In making unusual bids or plays, having an understanding partner is a big help when they backfire. While I believe there are some ethical reasons not to psych against inexperienced players,

all should be fair game against seasoned experts. Throw them the occasional curve ball. You might have fun with the results! ♣